

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 DAMASC 02912 01 OF 02 201719Z
ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8093
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
USLO RIYADH
USMISSION USUN NY
SECDEF WASHDC
DIA WASHDC

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 2912

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS, SY, LE, IS
SUBJ: WOULD SYRIA FIGHT TO PREVENT PARTITION OF LEBANON?

REF: BEIRUT 2707

1. SUMMARY: EMBASSY BEIRUT HAS POSED THE QUESTION OF SYRIA'S REACTION TO THE PARTITIONING OF LEBANON IF IT IS REWARDED WITH THE BEKAA VALLY AND, POSSIBLY, TRIPOLI. SYRIA, OF COURSE, MAINTAINS THAT ITS TROOPS ARE IN LEBANON TO ASSIST IN RESTORING THE AUTHORITY OF THE LEGITIMATE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT. IN REALITY, SYRIA'S VIEW OF PARTITION REGIONAL FRAGMENTATION, LEAD TO THE CRATIONOF A "SECOND

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PAGE 02 DAMASC 02912 01 OF 02 201719Z

ISRAEL AND IRAQ" ON SYRIA'S WESTERN BORDER,AND RUN COUNTER TO PREVALING BAATHI IDEOLOGY. SYRIA CANNOT DISMISS THE SUSPICION THAT ISRAL'S SUPPORT FOR THE MARONITES IS TIED TO A VAGUE PLAN TO BREAK UP SYRIA AND LEBANON INOT TINY SECTARIAN AND ETHNIC STATELETS. THE MARONITE STATE, THEY BELIEVE, WOULD BE ANOTHER STAGING BASE FOR "ZIONISM AND IMPERIALISM," WHILE A RADICAL MUSLIN/PALESTINIAN STATE WOULD SERVE IRAQI

ENDS. IF SYRIA EVER ACCEPTED A DEAL FOR PARTITION SYRIAN
BAATHISM WOULD BE DISCREDITED AND SUNNI SUSPICIONS ABOUT
THE ALAWITE COMMITMENT TO ARABISM WOULD BE CONFIRMED.
SYRIA'S POLICY IS STRONGLY GEARED TO AVOIDING ANY
MOVE TOWARD PARTITION. IT WILL CONTINUE TO DO SO BY ALL
MEANS INCLUDING ARMED FORCE SO LONG AS A LEGITIMATE
LEBANESE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT EXISTS. END SUMMARY.

2. SINCE A MOVE TOWARD PARTITIONING LEBANON REMAINS A REAL
POSSIBILITY, EMBASSY BEIRUT HAS POSED THE QUESTION OF WHAT
SYRIA'S REACTION WOULD BE. WOULD IT, FOR INSTANCE, ACQUIESCE
IF A LARGE SEGMENT OF LEBANON'S CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES SEEMED
DETERMINED TO ACHIEVE PARTITION? COULD IT CURRENT OPPOSI-
TION BE BOUGHT OFF BY PERMITTING IT TO ABSORB THOSE TERRI-
TORIIES LYING NORTH AND EAST OF THE CHRISTIAN HEARTLAND IN
MUCH THE SAME WAY THAT KING ABDALLAH ABSORBED THOSE AREAS OF
PALESTINE NOT OCCUPIED BY THE IDF IN 1949? AFTER ALL,
SYRIA HAS A RECENT HISTORY OF DISMEMBERMENT AT THE HANDS OF
THE BRITISH AND FRENCH IN THIS CENTURY AND MOST OF PRESENT-
DAY LEBANON WAS WIDELY VIEWED AS PART OF "GEOGRAPHIC OR
GREATER SYRIA". COULDN'T A CASE BE MADE FOR SUCH A DEAL?

3. SYRIA, OF COURSE, MAINTAINS THAT ITS TROOPS ENTERED
LEBANON STO STOP THE BLOODSHED, RESTORE ORDER, AND RETURN
SOVEREIGNTY TO THE LEGITIMATE CENTRAL AUTHORITIES. THEY
WISHED TO PREVENT A LEBANESE LEFTIST/ PALESTINIAN GOVERNMENT
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PAGE 03 DAMASC 02912 01 OF 02 201719Z

COMING TO POWER IN LEBANON OR IN THE SOUTHERN PORTION OF A
PARTITIONED LEBANON. THEY AGREED TO REMAIN ONLY UNTIL SUCH
TIME AS THE LEBANESE THEMSELVES COULD DO THE JOB OR THE
SYRIANS WERE REQUESTED BY THE LEGITIMATE CENTRAL AUTHORITIES
TO TERMINATE THEIR MISSION. WHILE SYRIA AT MANY JUNCTURES
HAS INTERFERED IN LEBANESE INTERNAL AFFAIRS AND MAINTAINED
CONTACTS WITH A WIDE SPECTRUM OF POLITICAL GROUPS PRESENT
IN THE COUNTRY, BY AND LARGE, IT CONFORTABLY HAS BEEN ABLE
TO TAKE REFUGE BEHIND ITS CLAIM TO BE ACTING ON BEHALF OF
PRESIDENT SARKIS AND HIS GOVERNMENT, SUCH AS MOST RECENTLY
IN THE ANY AL-RUMMANAH FIGHTING WHICH LED TO THE RESIGNATION
OF THE AL-HOSS GOVERNMENT. ITS OPPOSITION TO PARTITION TODAY
REMAINS AT LEAST AS STRONG IF NOT STRONGER THAN WHEN IT
FIRST INTERVENED IN LEBANON OVER TWO YEARS AGO.

4. THREE KEY FACTORS SHAPE SYRIA'S VIEW OF PARTITION:
-- THE DANGER OF INTERNAL INSTABILITY AND FRAGMENTATION
ALONG RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC LINES IN SYRIA, ITSELF, IF A
MARONITE STATE EMERGES.
-- THE DANGE OF A "SECOND ISRAEL" AND/OR A "SECOND IRAQ"
ON SYRIA'S WESTERN BORDERS.
-- THE CONTRADICTION PARTITION POSES TO BAATHI IDEOLOGY,

AND SYRIA'S VULNERABILITY TO ATTACK FROM DIVERSE ARAB
QUARTERS IF IT PERMITS IT.

5. FRAGMENTATION. WITHOUT BELABORING THE POINT, SYRIA IS
A PREDOMINANTLY SUNNI COUNTRY RULED BY A SOMEWHAT DESPISED
ALAWITE MINORITY WHICH WIDELY UTILIZES OTHER MINORITY GROUPS.
ITS MINORITIES ARE GEOGRAPHICALLY CONCENTRATED INCLUDING THE
DRUZE IN SOUTHWEST SYRIA, THE ALAWITES IN THE COASTAL MOUN-
TAINS AND INCREASINGLY THE KEY COASTAL CITIES, KURDS AND
OTHER MINORITIES IN THE NORTHWEST, AND AN IMPORTANT CHRISTIAN
MINORITY SPREAD THROUGHOUT MANY OF THE KEY CITIES. ASSAD'S
ACQUIESCENCE IN THE CREATION OF A MARONITE-DOMINATED STATE
WOULD CATALYZE THE AMORPHOUS OPPOSITION TO ASSAD AND THE
ALAWITES AROUND HIM AND CONFIRM TO MANY THE RUMORS THAT
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 04 DAMASC 02912 01 OF 02 201719Z

THE ALAWITES, BY ALIGNING THEMSELVES WITH THE MARONITES,
WERE "BUYING INSURANCE" AGAINST THE DAY THEY LOST POWER.
THE CHRISTIAN STATE COULD DRAW OFF SYRIA'S CHRISTIANS WHO
PROVIDED A SIGNIFICANT PORTION OF THE TECHNOCRATS AND MANAGERS
IN THIS SOCIETY AND EXACERBATE LATENT ANTI-CHRISTIAN SENTIMENT.
AN ATTEMPT TO ABSORB A PORTION OF LEBANON'S FACTIONALLY-
DIVIDED AND WELL-ARMED MUSLIMS AND PALESTINIAN WOULD PROVE
A FORMIDABLE TASK. WHILE ASSAD, AT LEAST, ON ONE OCCASION
HAS SPOKEN FOR THE RECORD OF THE POSSIBILITY OF INTRODUCING
LIMITED ADMINISTRATIVE DECENTRALIZATION, THE DESTABILIZING
EFFECTS OF PARTITION FOR SYRIA AND HIS REGIME ALONE WOULD
ARGUE STRONGLY AGAINST ACCEPTING IT IN ANY FORM.

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 02912 02 OF 02 201718Z
ACTION SS-25

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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 DAMASCUS 2912

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6. "A SECOND ISRAEL." ASSAD ORIGINALLY VIEWED MARONITE COOPERATION WITH ISRAEL AS SOMEWHAT UNDERSTANDABLE IN VIEW OF THE PALESTINIAN/LEFTIST THREAT, AND HE IN PART INTERVENED HOPING TO WEAN THEM AWAY FROM THE ISRAELIS. CONTINUING LINKS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND VARIOUS RIGHTIST GROUPS HAVE CONVINCED THE SYRIANS THAT A MARONITE-DOMINATED CHRISTIAN STATE WOULD BECOME ANOTHER STAGING BASE FOR "ZIONISM AND IMPERIALISM" AGAINST SYRIA AND THE ARABS. THE SYRIANS SEE IT AS AN INFERIOR, BUT STILL POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS, "SECOND ISRAEL." THIS REGIME HARBORS SUSPICIONS THAT ISRAEL'S ALLIANCE WITH SOME LEBANESE CHRISTIANS IS AIMED AT CHIEVING CREATION OF SECTARIAN STATE LETS IN THE REGION, THEREBY IN ONE STROKE FRAGMENTING ARAB OPPOSITION TO IT AND PROVIDING A COMFORTABLE
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PAGE 02 DAMASC 02912 02 OF 02 201718Z

ENVIRONMENT FOR A JEWISH ISRAEL TO DOMINATE AND FLOURISH. THE PARTITIONING OF LEBANON WOULD ALMOST SURELY, IN SYRIA'S VIEW, LEAD TO ISRAEL'S REOCCUPATION OF THE AREAS UP TO THE LITANI AND THE DISTRICTS WEST OF IT AROUND HASBAYYA. MOREOVER, A RADICAL AND UNSTABLE PALESTINIAN-DOMINATED MUSLIM STATELET WOULD IN ALL LIKELIHOOD BE CREATED FROM WEST BEIRUT DOWN TO THE ISRAELI LINES. THE ISRAELIS MIGHT EVEN ENCOURAGE ITS FORMATION IN AN ATTEMPT TO JUSTIFY THEIR CONTINUING OCCUPATION OF THE WEST BANK AND GAZA BY CLAIMING THAT THIS SHOULD BE THE AREA IN WHICH PALESTINIAN NATIONALISM FINDS ITS EXPRESSION. THE ISRAELI OCCUPATION OF SOUTH LEBANON AND THE CREATION OF RADICAL MUSLIM PALESTINIAN STATE WOULD BOTH POSE A GRAVE THREAT TO THIS REGIME AND SYRIA. ISRAEL WOULD BE BETTER POSITIONED TO ENCIRCLE THE SYRIAN ARMY AND A "SECOND IRAQ" WOULD COME INTO BEING ON SYRIA'S WESTERN BORDER.

7. BAATHIST IDEOLOGY. IN THE BAATHI LEXICON, FEW WORDS ARE MORE DISPARAGING THAN "IQLIMIYYA" (REGIONALISM). THE BAATHI VIEW IS THAT THE ARABS FROM IRAQ TO MOROCCO ARE ONE NATION AND THAT STATES WORKING FOR A REGIONAL GROUPING OR

A SEPARATE IDENTITY (E.G., EGYPTIAN, PAN-SYRIAN, ETC.) AT THE EXPENSE OF PAN-ARABISM ARE COMMITTING A DEADLY SIN. IF SYRIA WERE TO BE MIDWIFE TO A CHRISTIAN STATE RECEIVING IN EXCHANGE TERRITORIES IN NORTH LEBANON AND THE BEKAA, IT COULD EXPECT SEVERE CRITICISM FROM ALL OVER THE ARAB WORLD BUT NO PLACE MORE THAN FROM BAATHIST IRAQ. DISAFFECTED BAATHI ELEMENTS HERE WOULD PROVIDE IRAQ AND OTHERS WITH ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUBVERSION. SYRIAN BAATHISM WOULD BE DISCREDITED AND LOSE ITS ALREADY LIMITED APPEAL AMONG ARAB YOUTHS.

8. HAVING SAID THIS, IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT SYRIAN
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 DAMASC 02912 02 OF 02 201718Z

POLICY IS GEARED TO AVOIDING ANY ATTEMPT AT PARTITION. AS WE NOTED IN A RECENT CABLE, SYRIA IS CONSTANTLY ATTEMPTING TO MANEUVER AMONG THE VARIOUS CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM LEBANESE FACTIONS. THIS IS MOST EVIDENT NOW IN ITS DEALINGS WITH THE LEBANESE FRONT. AFTER GEMAYEL'S RECENT VISIT HERE A PHALANGIST SYRIAN COORDINATION COMMITTEE WAS ANNOUNCED. MANY SUSPECT THAT A FACTION OF THE LEBANESE FRONT WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RECENT BLOODY EXPLOSION IN ZGHORTA IN PROTEST AGAINST FRANGIEH'S BREAK WITH THE LF, AND THE PHALANGE AND NLP RECENTLY CLASHED. THE SYRIANS, WHETHER OR NOT RESPONSIBLE, MUST ALSO BE PLEASED BY THE RECENT FRANGIEH-KARAME MEETING. IN EFFECT, MANY DIVISIONS ARE NOW APPARENT WITHIN THE LF THAT THE SYRIANS CAN EXPLOIT TO HEAD OFF SENTIMENT FOR PARTITION AND THUS AVOID A HOBSON'S CHOICE. THE DIVIDED MUSLIM COMMUNITY PROVIDES EVEN GREATER OPPORTUNITIES FOR MANEUVER WITH THE SYRIANS ATTEMPTING TO BOLSTER THE QANSO WING OF THE BAATH, SHATILA'S "NASSERISTS" AND COURT VARIOUS TRADITIONAL POLS INCLUDING WALID JUMBLATT AND RASHID KARAME.

9. THUS, SYRIA WILL CONTINUE TO SUPPORT THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT EVEN IF PRESENTED WITH SUCH TEMPTATIONS AS "RESTITUTION" OF NORTH LEBANON AND THE BEKAA IN RETURN FOR ACCEPTING OVERT OR DISGUISED PARTITION. WE BELIEVE ASSAD'S REGIME WILL CONTINUE TO RESIST PARTITION BY ALL AVAILABLE MEANS INCLUDING MILITARY UNLESS IT IS FACED WITH THE COMPLETE DISINTEGRATION OF THE LEBANESE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT.
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